

COUNTER- NARRATIVES AND OTHER FALLACIES

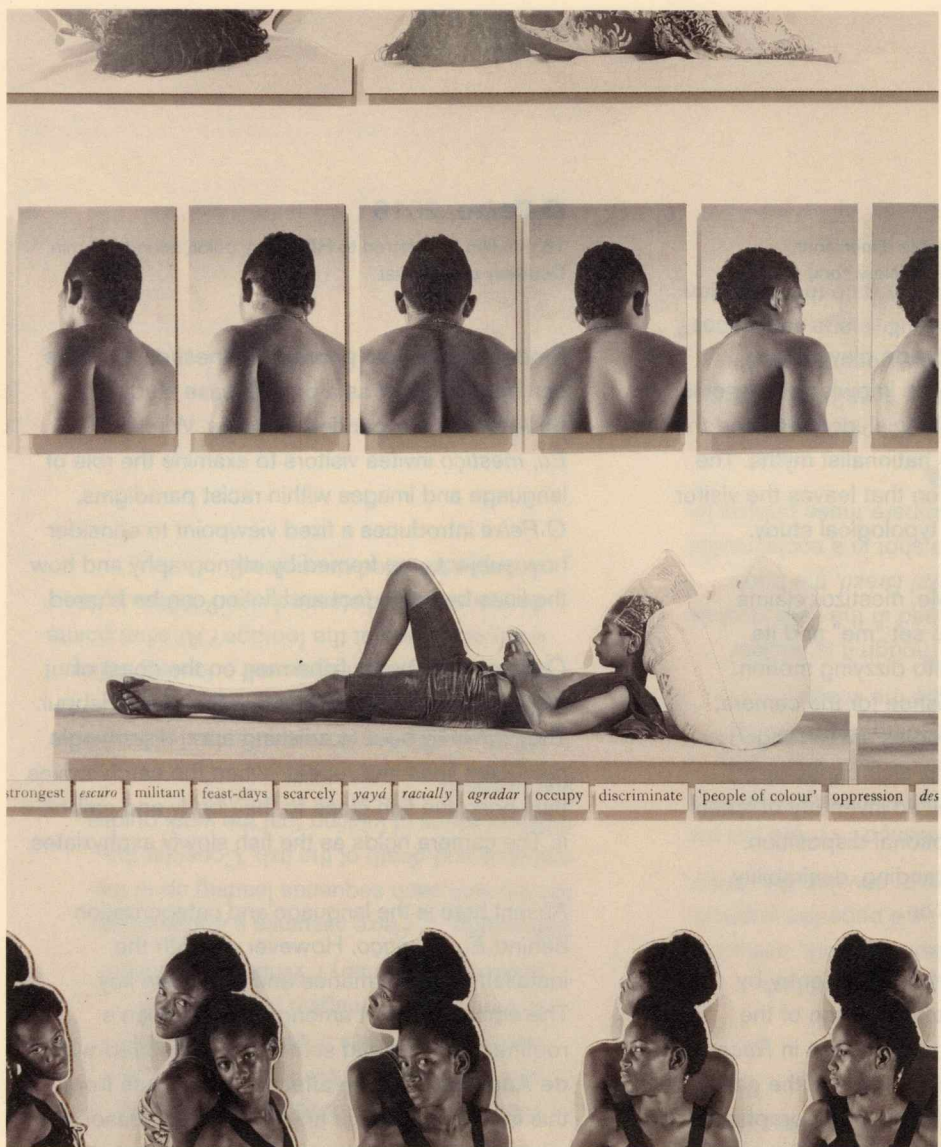
JONATHAS DE ANDRADE

CURATOR: MARÍA WILLS LONDOÑO,
IN COLLABORATION WITH AUDREY GENOIS
AND MAUDE JOHNSON

EXHIBITION AS PART OF MOMENTA | BIENNALE DE L'IMAGE
AND PRODUCED IN COLLABORATION WITH THE
LEONARD & BINA ELLEN ART GALLERY



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Jonathas de Andrade, *Eu, mestiço*, 2017 (detail), UV prints on Falconboard, variable dimensions.
 Installation view, Alexander and Bonin (New York). Photo credits: Joerg Lohse. Courtesy of
 Alexander and Bonin (New York). © Jonathas de Andrade

WAYS OF THINKING

Ways of Thinking is designed for anyone interested in exploring contemporary art and its exhibition framework. It succinctly synthesizes information on the exhibition's concept, the artists and the works featured. For the complete version of *Ways of Thinking*, please see our website: <http://ellengallery.concordia.ca/ways-of-thinking/current/?lang=en>

Jonathas de Andrade addresses cultural and identity issues by exploring collective memory and historical narratives. He deals with blind spots and omissions in dominant narratives, uncovering the inherent violence of these discourses.

In his exhibition ***Counter-narratives and other fallacies***, **de Andrade** examines the processes of thingification by looking into the paradoxes that link corporality and violence. For the photo installation *Eu, mestiço*, he uses the study behind the book *Race and Class in Rural Brazil* (1952) as a starting point for outlining current racism issues in Brazil and questioning the categorization processes at the core of the research, which apparently conditioned the racist ideas that it purported to criticize. Led by Charles Wagley from the Department of Anthropology of Columbia University, the project was developed in the post-war context of the 1950s, during which the idea of racial democracy was highly regarded and investigated. The images used to conduct the research—and that led participants to express prejudices—were not published in the book. To compensate for this omission, **de Andrade** produced a series of contemporary photographic portraits that off-centre a conception of Brazilian identity. In Ilhéus (located in the same region where Wagley conducted his work), Imperatriz, São Luís, and São Paulo, he presented the study to potential models—people he met in the street—and asked them to perform the social categories described in the book. These images are juxtaposed here with text fragments from the book—a book that helped to shape the fallacies on which this conception of Brazilian identity was built.

In the video *O Peixe*, **de Andrade** examines the power relationships and dynamics of domination that humans enact over animals, as well as over their fellow human beings. Much like ethnographic films, *O Peixe* depicts what appears to be a ritual among fishermen in a coastal Brazilian village. In front of the camera, a fisherman catches a fish and hugs it gently until it dies. Imbued with both tenderness and violence, the gesture of affection that leads the animal to its death was conceived and staged by the artist but performed by actual fishermen. *O Peixe* simultaneously adopts and subverts the ethnographic approach, which, through its “gaze,” has the power to legitimize fantasy.

Counter-narratives and other fallacies presents strategies that disentangle the body from the coercive relationship and transform it into a thing. The theatrical and performative modes at the centre of these works create a distancing that allows for the critical reappropriation and dislocation of “corporalized” violence: a possible dethingification.

– Maria Wills Londoño, in collaboration with Audrey Genois and Maude Johnson

KEYWORDS

THINGIFICATION

Under chattel slavery people are treated as things, as commodities to be stolen and sold for their labour capacity. This violent objectification, turning people into objects, imposes a uniformity on bodies by treating them as interchangeable property to be exhausted, discarded, and replaced in the interest of accumulating wealth. This logic is also shared within natural and physical sciences as developed from the Enlightenment on, where the detailed study and classification of bodies marked as other than a white European ideal informs a scientific racism underlying the colonial project which persists in different forms today. Accordingly, by relegating people to objects, objectivity is a form of gatekeeping of subjectivity.

RACIAL DEMOCRACY

Conceived in Brazil through the first half of the twentieth-century, the racial democracy thesis lays claim to a political and social system where race is no longer an obstruction to social mobility. Widely adopted at a state-level, this narrative is guided by the notion that racial prejudice can not hold within Brazil's highly mixed society, drawing further legitimacy through the belief that the country's Imperial period and centuries-long engagement with-slavery and land dispossession was mitigated and ultimately transformed by miscegenation.

ETHNOGRAPHIC GAZE

As a scientific method, ethnography takes as its subject the culture of people and communities. It is executed in the field, collecting data through processes that aim for the immediate transmission of experience. The idea of the ethnographic gaze questions the presumed neutrality of these methods and resulting studies. A distanced standpoint or tone, romanticisation of the other, a disavowal of the presence the researcher, and the editing and manipulation of material are all suspect. Moreover, the gaze is not necessarily visual, rather it refers to an authorial space where the representation of the “object” of study is commandeered and contorted into an image that suits the researcher’s desires.

AFFECT AND EMOTION

Affect and emotion can be approached as two (not always exclusive) categories of feeling. Where emotion is understood as an internal feeling, anchored in the self, affect is all the more abstract and centreless. As an identifiable response with a function and meaning, emotion can be thought of as narrative, while affect is a feeling that skirts categorization, its source and destination unclear. Where emotion is internal and personal, affect is found in between bodies. In this sense, affect is unfixed and uncertain; it can leave us restless in the structures around us, moving us around to feel out and apply pressure to their limits.

WORKS

Eu, mestiço, 2017

UV prints on Falconboard, variable dimensions
Courtesy of Alexander and Bonin (New York)

With *Eu, mestiço* **de Andrade** plays the anthropologist, mirroring the knowledge systems behind the assignment of racial identities and the drive to categorize within nationalist myths. The result is a photo installation that leaves the visitor to navigate a large-scale typological study.

By its title *Eu, mestiço* (Me, mestizo) claims a subject position, only to set “me” and its accompanying qualifier into dizzying motion. “Me” becomes a performance for the camera, examined from multiple angles and arranged in series and grids. “Me” is also captioned, underlined, or bisected by an inventory of labels concerning heritage, emotional disposition, labour roles, economic standing, desirability, physical qualities, and so on.

Key to **de Andrade**’s method is his entry by way of an absence. While the source of the photographs used in the field studies in *Race and Class in Rural Brazil* (also on view in the gallery) remains unclear, **de Andrade**’s photographs are the product of conversations with each participant regarding roles and representation. Adopting an objective standpoint, **de Andrade** first spotted his participants at a distance—eyeing vernacular life and sizing up personalities and types—before inviting them to his studio. Behind this process is another hidden source: *The Fairburn System of Visual Reference*, published in 1970. By using this exhaustive catalogue of human figures, **de Andrade** equally contends with the persistence of typological systems within art education and the study of the body.

In occupying these systems **de Andrade** knowingly risks proximity to a racist logic. At the same time, he has dismantled the original study, isolating and drawing out its most barbed words. His studio sessions at different locations in Brazil reserved space for role-playing and self-representation among the participants. *Eu, mestiço* arranges an uneasy space for the visitor, an insider’s view that lays bare how image and text can service racist systems of thought and governance.

EXPLORE

A living report. Combining image and text, *Eu, mestiço* is a highly graphical work, using the gallery’s white walls both as a page-like support and as a means to enclose or envelop the visitor.

- How do you read *Eu, mestiço*? Where are the points of tension between the images and the photographs? In what ways do the images influence your understanding of the words? How do the words shape the image?

Forms of representation. Though it is unclear what photographs were used in the field studies for *Race and Class in Rural Brazil*, the book does include photographs shot in a social-realist style by Pierre Verger. Compare these photos to those shot by **de Andrade**.

- What differences can be seen between the two styles? What are their aims? What points of view are adopted? How does the single portraits compare to the multi-image sequences? Can you use the book to navigate the exhibition and vice-versa?

O Peixe, 2016

16 mm film transferred to HD video, color, sound, 38 min.
Courtesy of the artist

Produced one year prior to *Eu, mestiço*, *O Peixe* can be thought of as a parallel case study to **de Andrade**’s expanded typology. Where *Eu, mestiço* invites visitors to examine the role of language and images within racist paradigms, *O Peixe* introduces a fixed viewpoint to consider how subjects are framed by ethnography and how the lines between fact and fiction can be blurred.

O Peixe documents fishermen on the coast of north-eastern Brazil conducting their usual labour. They travel by boat to a fishing spot, disentangle nets, cast lines and repeat—when the catch arrives they bring the fish close to their body and embrace it. The camera holds as the fish slowly asphyxiates.

Absent here is the language and categorization behind *Eu, mestiço*. However, as with the installation, performance and affect are key. The embrace is not among the fishermen’s routines. It is instead something conspired with **de Andrade**. Yet, the affect that amounts from this insertion troubles any easy object lesson on ethnography’s capacity for fabulation that *O Peixe* might first be presumed to offer.

First exploiting film’s ability to open up a space for desire and exoticization, the camera lingers on the men’s bodies as they work and rest. As the fish come into their arms this objective distance gives way to a palpable proximity between man and animal. True, it is a fiction, but it is also true that these are real fish slowly dying before the camera. As *Eu, mestiço* rehearses violent systems of knowledge by bringing the visitor within them, so *O Peixe* holds its frame in order to test the endurance of a sustained ethnographic gaze. It’s a waiting game. An experiment equally broken as the fishermen glance up to gaze back at the viewer.

EXPLORE

Field recordings. Audio is an important element in *O Peixe*, using a surround sound system to immerse the visitor in the coastal environment.

- What do these situated sounds bring to your experience of the work? Is it simply background? Does it add to the veracity of the footage? Imagine the work with spoken commentary? What would it say?

Witnessing. *O Peixe* assumes a documentary format, with each sequence leading up to the embrace and death of the fish. Consider the different forms of looking that the work guides you towards.

- What information do you attempt to draw from the film? What information might it promise to deliver? Do you find yourself adopting different ways of looking at the footage? At what points do you share a distanced view? When is this distance troubled or unclear?

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MOMENTA
BIENNALE DE L'IMAGE

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